



# **CROSSTALK**

2000-01

## **OFFICE OF SECURITY AND EMERGENCY OPERATIONS**

### **ANTHRAX INCIDENTS**

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#### ***SUMMARY***

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At approximately 8:00AM on November 8, 1999, a coffee cup with a handwritten sticky note attached to it was found in an open conference room at a DOE facility. The note contained the message "Anthrax sample, do not touch." The building was evacuated and the material secured by EPA personnel and removed from the site. A preliminary test determined that the cup *did not contain anthrax spores*. The incident appears to have been someone's bad idea of a joke.

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#### ***BACKGROUND***

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After the cup and note were discovered, the area was evacuated and a hazmat team secured the material in place. The FBI and the EPA were notified. EPA personnel in protective suits secured the sample at about 12:00 noon and removed it to their nearby facility for testing, even though they had concluded at the site that this was a *low credibility event*. (The material in the cup was still wet and therefore could not spread [anthrax] spores. Moreover, witnesses had reported seeing the cup and note the week before the incident.) Evacuated personnel were briefed and released. One person who came in contact with the cup was subjected to a wash-up procedure.

Anthrax is one of many biological warfare agents, although its effective use by terrorists may be much harder than previously thought. Aum Shinrikyo, the Japanese cult responsible for the Tokyo sarin attack, made a number of attempts in the early 1990s to spread anthrax in Japan, including against the US Naval Base at Yokosuka. Despite access to almost unlimited funds and some of the best science graduates of Japanese universities, for technical reasons they failed to infect anyone.

Anthrax is a bacterial disease and occurs in domestic and wild animals, including goats, sheep, cattle, horses and deer. It is spread by spores which must be inhaled, ingested or introduced into an open wound or the eyes to cause infection. *The disease cannot be spread by infected persons.* Moreover, the act of opening an envelope or package containing a suspected agent would generally not result in aerosolization and therefore would not cause infection.

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## ***CURRENT LAW AND RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES***

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Threatening the use of a biological agent is prosecutable under federal law. Listed below is a summary of FBI recommended procedures for handling such incidents. More detailed procedures may be obtained from the FBI's National Domestic Preparedness Office or their web site at <http://www.fbi.gov/programs/ndpo/default.htm>.

- Upon receipt of a threat, the FBI should immediately be notified and a hazard risk assessment should be conducted. Technical assistance may be obtained from the National Response Center at 1-800-424-8802 or local FBI office. The FBI will coordinate a risk assessment in conjunction with health authorities and appropriate experts and insure timely dissemination of technical advice.
- Responders can be protected by donning splash protection, gloves, and a full face respirator with High Efficiency Particulate Arresting level C filters, or self contained breathing apparatus. (Chemical protective masks recommended by the Office of Security and Emergency Operations will also provide protection.)
- Contaminated evidence should be triple-bagged.
- Potentially contaminated victims should be decontaminated with soap and water. Bleach solutions are required only if there is confirmation of the agent and soap and water are ineffective in removing it. Potentially contaminated individuals should await lab tests, which will be available within 48 hours. It is *not* necessary to begin immediate treatment with drugs.

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## ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

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Hoax anthrax incidents have become almost as common as telephone bomb threats, and others can be expected.

- Security managers should ensure that appropriate response procedures are in place, understood, and exercised.

- **Procedures should be implemented to ensure that protective apparatus is kept in proper working condition, and that decontamination supplies are adequate.**
- **Emphasize that a hoax of this type is a federal crime.**